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Knowledge and dialogue to deal with uncertainty

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"Knowledge is power" was written more than 400 years ago by Francis Bacon. Centuries later, Einstein cautioned: "Information is not knowledge. The only source of knowledge is experience." We gain experience by promoting curiosity, imagination and the audacity to question authority. Most of us take for granted the advances in science that allowed our planet's population to have more than quadrupled and our average

lifespan more than doubled in just over a century. We also take for granted the social reforms that have abolished absolute monarchies and slavery, and that have given women the right to vote and workers the right to fight for better working conditions. And yet, issues such as nuclear waste, climate change and acquired antibiotic resistance, continue to be seen by many, as unforeseen and potentially dangerous consequences of the application of our knowledge. Topics like genome editing, artificial intelligence and human enhancement provide further evidence of these concerns. There is a pressing need for meaningful dialogue between citizens and experts so that policy decisions about technological choices may be trusted. Understanding the risks involved in the search for, and in the uses of, new knowledge has become and will remain a major concern of our democracies.

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